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D. R. Jack



THE BUSS

AND THE

BLUNDERBUSS.

A Story of the Past in New Brunswick,
Founded on Facts.

BY I. ALLEN JACK, D. C. L.

Abner Crandall came to the door of his inn, smoking a long clay and looking and feeling contented. He was in his shirt sleeves, but that helped to show that his waist-coat was a fine one and that it was rather long. Upon the whole, notwithstanding the absence of his coat, what with his dark knee breeches and stockings and his shining shoe buckles, there was a good deal about him of the modified fop. Certainly anyone who saw him, where he lived in the woods, would have regarded him, for his costume alone, as an unexpected reminder of life not in or of the country. But though art may have been kind to him, nature, on the contrary, had treated Abner rather scurvily. He was a tall though not a very straight man, and almost everyone beholding him was led to believe that it was originally intended that he should have been large in every way

physically, if not mentally. There was a great deal about him that was large, and there was nothing insignificant about his ears or his nose or his mouth. But his eyes and also his calves were abnormally small, and what was peculiarly sad about his features of magnitude was that they did not match nor serve to constitute a harmonious or properly proportioned whole. It must also be confessed that his complexion suggested neither roses nor lilies nor any attractive or healthy natural object or tint but, simply or solely, putty. Appearance, however, as every one knows, is not everything in a man. It is much more important than painting his physical portrait to know who he is and what he does.

Now, in respect to what he was and what he intended to do at that particular time, it may be stated that Abner, in his day, had been an impor-

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NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THE ROOM

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tant functionary, especially in a new country where culture had largely to stand aside till the vulgar body could be decently housed and fed. He had been, in short, such an one as Ben Johnson described, as a "poor, pedantic schoolmaster, sweeping a living from the posteriors of little children." Not that he had been very poor. He had never been quite that, and, had he been better paid, he would have been fairly rich, as he had few wants and rarely tried to supply the wants of others.

Many tried, but all failed, to guess by what arts he had succeeded in gaining the hand and, perhaps, the heart of Nancy, the pretty daughter of old man Folkins, the proprietor of the principal tavern and changing house on a well-travelled king's highway. Seth Clowes said it was because Abner talked Latin, which Nancy could not understand, and on the undertaking that he would give up singing his only song, that she had promised to take him.

But Seth was an old hanger on of Nancy, and, to use a vulgar, but expressive, word of today, which Seth's acquaintances would not have used, because it had not then been invented, he was decidedly disgruntled and, besides, he was always a bit crabbed in his talk. Probably the old man had a good deal more to do with making the match than his daughter, but certainly Abner had not neglected his opportunities with either of them. He and the innkeeper, although inhabitants of a British province, had at one time been neighbors in Long Island till the war made it too hot for them, and they liked to talk of old times over their rum and water and pipes. And regularly every year a brother of Abner

used to send him a barrel or box, the contents of which, costing him nothing, he generously shared with his heart's delight and her father. It is not, indeed, recorded that either shag-balls or ripston pippins ever promoted matrimony, but there is no knowing what credit they deserve among those who have achieved conjugal bliss. It is now, however, quite out of the question to gather the incidents of a long-forgotten courtship, and it is sufficient to state that the lover, with his gimlet-hole eyes and shrunken shanks, led to the altar the fair country maiden: that, within a year, her father died, and that the united pair thereupon entered into possession of the snug hostelry with its not unremunerative business and well-stocked outhouses and barns.

Ungifted with prescience, though abounding in many natural and acquired powers, the ex-dominie concluded his pipe, uninterrupted by untoward event or disturbing thought, and, first stretching his arms in the way that oftener indicates contentment than fatigue, strolled off to a neighboring building which lay to one side and in advance of the house. Thence, in a short while, the sound of a bucksaw struggling with more or less knotty wood, followed by occasional noises from far-pitched billets, proclaimed that he was attending to one of the chores which men would fain neglect in summer weather.

II.

It was not many minutes after the rasping saw was heard, that the youthful mistress of the inn appeared at its door, and seated herself on the step with a pan of pease, which she forthwith proceeded to shell in the bright but pleasant sunshine. She certainly

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was winsome to look upon, not that she reminded one of great living beauties or even of the picture of any one of those of the past. But it might, at least, be said of her, without exaggeration, that she fairly realized the ideal of an artistic and poetic soul, of a country girl which, in actual experience, not very often assumes material form. It is needless to say more, to seek to multiply the number of those induced to abandon food or waste breath in sighing by reason of her attractions, either from sight or report. Let then exact description be omitted, excepting only as to her hands which rested inert and pink among the green pods, as she paused from her task and raised her head to listen.

Half a mile away where the forest, which continued till it reached the score or so of acres under cultivation, was thickest, someone was having a canter and was approaching. There was no doubt of that, and Nancy could not but congratulate herself on the prospect of a break in the anticipated monotony of the day. "He who canters," thought she, "has a horse that is not spiritless from dull farm work; he may have fine clothes and some ideas beyond those which have been passed about and worn threadbare among the country folk."

It was not long before the rider appeared, and it was inevitable that he should tarry, at least long enough for bit and sup, if he had any inkling of the most respected rule of that particular road. He was a gentleman, every inch of him, any Chesterfield and any hypercritical prier of the hot goose would have said at once, while his horse would have passed muster at Tattersall's or anywhere. A good looking man of thirty-five or so, with a face which suggested rather a

knowledge of men and women than of books, and a desire to stand well in this world without any pressing anxiety as to what his chances might be in another.

"Mistress Crandall," quoth he, after he had brought his horse to a halt and greeted her with graceful courtesy. "I see that holy matrimony has diminished neither your beauty nor your industry. It pains me much to have to interfere with the latter only to shorten my enjoyment of the former; but as you know needs must when the devil drives, I have, indeed, to ride far and fast, but not without your aid. So, Nancy as you love me, or rather as you ought to love worthy Master Abner, get me what delights my heart to drink, and do not fail to make it strong, and get it quickly."

If Nancy failed to satisfy his first requirement, which need not be presumed, she at least lost no time in procuring from the house something in a drinking vessel, the strength of which, however, she proceeded to modify from the contents of a dripping bucket which, aided by the long swinging pole, she drew from the well which flanked the inn, in sight of the thirsty traveller. Lightly stepping on the boulder from which riders mounted, at which he was stationed, she presented the goblet to the horseman, and waited there till he had satisfied his thirst. He drank, and then, as he returned the cup, he deftly put his arm about her waist and kissed her.

"O, Squire," she cried, wholly taken by surprise and blushing, "how could you?"

But he, with a smile and a merry farewell, put spurs to his horse and rode away.

There are no specific directions for the conduct of those who have been

kissed against their will, though, doubtless, repeated experience, may induce an individual to determine what in each instance, for complete identity of incidents in every case is improbable, is the proper thing to do. Now, both history and tradition are silent as to whether Nancy had ever been kissed before by any one who had not an absolutely perfect, not merely an implied, right to the sweets gatherable from her lips. As she made no special commotion, it might fairly be inferred—but no, upon the whole, no incontrovertible inference can be drawn; there is, after all, something in the recorded incident akin to the tale of the lady and the tiger; the reader can arrive at some conclusion, satisfactory it may be hoped, without the writer's aid.

It was of course quite proper that Nancy should look at the receding horseman and she did so till he vanished in the distance. It was equally proper that she should look towards the structure which concealed her spouse; it is a question whether she should not have looked there first, though nothing was thereby revealed to her enquiring eyes. And yet, to her woman's wit there was a revelation in the perfect stillness in that quarter. In the cessation of the sound of the saw and tumbling chunks of wood, something amiss might, with reason, be suspected; and with natural intuition and what was akin, yet only akin, to the pricks of conscience, she felt that there was danger in the air, and fled to one of woman's citadels, her kitchen.

III.

Absolute silence, even in remote country places, is rare. There is gen-

erally some man or woman or beast or bird or, perhaps, a buzzing or chirping insect ready to prove his, her or its vitality and importance, or, in default of these, a babbling, dashing or tinkling brook. With the disappearance of its mistress, however, all about the roadside tavern became very still, so still indeed that a grass-hopper, after crying "clip! clip! clip!" in one short flight, at once dropped back into the field and instructed its comrades and laid down the rule for itself to be entirely quiet.

Under such favorable conditions, the sensitive Remenyi might have played his violin in the sweetest temper, nor should it be wholly a cause for wonder that Abner, having the divine gift, proceeded to sing. It has been hinted that his musical repertoire was limited, and in truth, although he could and did, on Sundays, join heartily in the psalms, he knew but one secular song. But this to him was what *The Wearing of the Green* is to Irishmen of the South, *Boyne Water* to those of the North, the *Star Spangled Banner* to a citizen of the great American Republic, or, rather what some grand old Latin hymn is to a learned prelate with poetic and tuneful sympathies.

It served, indeed, in some inscrutable way, to inspire Abner, when languid and aimless, and to develop his reasoning powers when life presented some knotty problem for his solution. And then he had brought to bear upon this song all his powers; warbling crescendo, diminuendo, staccato or larghetto, according to his conception of the appropriate, and extracting from the words pathos, energy and, indeed, any and every quality which no one before supposed them to contain. There had not then

been a Browning; consequently there were no Browning societies to bring forth jewels of thought out of turgid wordy depths, or elevate the trivial into empyrean.

Had there been such, how profitably the members might have employed themselves with these verses:

Our Josiah and Uncle Sam,
They built up a ship in the shape of a clam,
On the north side of Nantucket P'int.

They histed her jib to wear her around,
And she with her starn went plump aground,
On the north side of Nantucket P'int.†

Then our Josiah began to cry,
And Uncle Sam he swore he would die,
All for the loss of the ship Punkin' Fly;‡
On the north side of Nantucket P'int.

The final stanza ended with a positive wail, which reflected not merely the unhappiness of the two men of Nantucket, but the sad perplexity of the singer.

And surely, in spite of the attempts of Chaucer and others to extract merriment out of tales of those ignoring marital rights, this man had reason to be very angry and perplexed. It will, indeed, be a most unhappy day for society, much as it may, as a rule, abhor monopolies, when it does not insist that a husband has a complete right to guard his wife from the audacious lips of a stranger.

Abner always thought more strongly than he spoke; but, if he did not, on this occasion, rave and swear, it is certain that his heart was filled with anathemas against squirearchies and all the classes unduly exercising or claiming privileges. Yet all his wrath was directed against the squire, for, to his credit, he entirely exonerated his wife, not only from blame, but from the faintest suspicion of impropriety.

But what could he, and what should

he do? He knew what gentlemen had done under like circumstances. Indeed, it was then not so long ago that poor Hamilton had fallen in a duel, while more than one affair of honor had happened in his own Province. He even knew the fitting language for a cartel, and could readily refer to the form in the Complete Letter Writer, which formed one of the few cherished volumes which he possessed.

He sat and thought for fully an hour; then he slowly returned to the inn. Nothing was said by either of them of what had taken place, or even of the visit from the squire, and Nancy almost began to think that, after all, Abner had not seen the equestrian or his amatory salutation. But, before long, she was led to fear that something was wrong and that something was going to happen. Abner talked less than usual and indulged in unwonted periods of abstraction, and he had been alone in the kitchen, for an hour or so very late one night and, next morning, she had found an iron ladle out of place.

Had she been trained to reason, she might from such premises as these, have guessed his intention, and taken means to prevent a possible catastrophe. She, however, neither guessed nor suspected more than a small fraction of what was in his mind, indeed merely a part of his trouble and nothing of his purpose; and, as her head failed to help her, she contented herself with following the promptings of her heart.

During the ensuing week she was like an angel in the house; twice she made him a blueberry pudding, and each day she gave him loaf sugar in his tea.

But more than once, when she was

alone, she aroused herself from a brown study, and exclaimed, with warmth,—"Drat the squire."

IV.

More than twenty miles from the scene of the events recorded, the highway, on which the osculatory horseman had ridden, reached one of a series of soul-satisfying scenes. On one side, distant less than a quarter of a mile, a pleasant little bay lay smiling, guarded at one of the points which flanked its entrance by a crane. This sentinel was never absent during the hours of daylight, and, according to the Indians, there had never been a time when the bird or one of his ancestors had not been there. Above the road the land sloped upwards, terminating in what could scarcely be designated a mountain, but was certainly a mountainous hill. Its peak was bald, or merely covered with turf, but along its sides maple, beech, fir and other trees clustered closely, reflected on one side by a lake, and abruptly terminating on another on the margin of a pasturage. Below this and surrounded by other trees, chiefly ash, birch and elm, stood a stone dwelling, with long sloping roof, and, under the bedroom flat, a veranda with trellised front and sides, covered with climbing roses and vines. From the house an avenue led to the road through a well-trimmed lawn, with trees sufficient in number to afford shade without interrupting the view.

It would have been difficult to find a more refreshing place on that quiet midsummer afternoon, with the heat, although diminishing as evening approached, yet still intense, than the room fronting on the lawn. The colors of wall paper, curtains and carpet were so well harmonized

that the detection of details of tinting was difficult, especially in the subdued light. The massive, but not ungraceful, mahogany furniture, the cabinets filled with knick-knacks, the china jars and plaques and the oil paintings, with heavy gilt frames, suggested taste and comfort and ancestry. Then there was that fine commingling of odors from potpourri and from blooming roses which stood in clusters in vases or guarded, outside, in front of the open casement windows.

Mrs. Wentworth was alone in this cosy apartment and, as usual when her day's work was over, she was reading. A calm faced woman with an air of refinement that was nearly queenlike, but was so tempered by a gentleness, manifested in every varied expression of her intelligent and mobile face, and in every gesture, that no one would suspect her of harboring pride or even being quite aware of her many and varied personal attributes and legitimate claims. For some years she had been the loved and loving wife of the kissing rider and dratted squire and, although her affection did not render her blind to his faults, she had every confidence in his good intentions and in their ultimately accomplishing permanently good results. His rather free and easy life, when single, was not unremembered or wholly unmentioned by his associates, and, more than once rumors of occurrences to his discredit had reached her ears. They made, however, no lasting serious impression on her mind, nor was she disconcerted when, occasionally it became manifest that he was not always able to escape from the influence of former habits. But she was no Evadne, of the Heavenly Twins, and,

if she had ever encountered one of Evadne's kind, she had not yielded to her reasoning. She looked to her husband, indeed, to produce good grain, but, if it should be found to contain a few wild oats, she saw in that no reason to condemn the crop in its entirety. At least once a day she presented little parcels of what she chose, but few others would have thought necessary, to designate sins before her God and asked to be forgiven on their account. But her request was coupled with a condition that their forgiveness should always be preceded by forgiveness on her part of every wrong which had been done to her, and with that condition, in its fullest meaning, she absolutely complied.

She was almost wholly immersed in the volume before her, when her attention was diverted by the sharp click of the closing of the gate at the end of the avenue, and, raising her eyes, she saw someone whom, at first, she failed to recognize. "Surely," she thought as she beheld Abner, for it was he, "the crane has at last left the shore and is coming to leave his card."

Slowly and wearily the unhappy man approached, but, although faint in body, his determination held good, and so he walked, without a pause, till he reached the door, and there he knocked. Mrs. Wentworth herself opened it and greeted him. "Why, Master Crandall! How tired you look; come in at once and let me get you a glass of wine and something to eat." Abner, notwithstanding much pressing, refused point blank to enter, but asked to see the Squire, and

learned from her that he was absent and would not return till the morrow.

The expression of her visitor's face and his entire demeanor convinced her that there was something serious on his mind; then it quickly dawned upon her that the thing which he held in his hand, awkwardly wrapped in some cheap fabric, was a lethal weapon with a bell-shaped mouth.

With Mrs. Wentworth, when it seemed necessary, to think was to act, and so, in spite of his efforts, firm at first but gradually weakening, to conceal the facts, she finally extracted from the ex-school master the truth, and it may be added, nothing but the truth. Then she looked at him, with humorous solemnity, and said: "Master Crandall, you foolish, foolish man! So the squire kissed your wife. Well then; you kiss me."

The old gossips used to say that Abner got his glass of wine, and that, the next day, he was heard, on his homeward way, carolling so blithely of our Josiah and Uncle Sam that you would have supposed they had launched, not wrecked, their clam-shaped ship. It may be added, in conclusion, that, many years afterwards, a newspaper-man was presented with a queer old fashioned weapon with a bell-shaped mouth, in which a bullet was firmly jammed, found, as it was alleged, by a dredger in the bay described. As there was no one to give a proper explanation, the journalist recognized his obvious duty, and accounted for the discovery, by the former presence in the locality of the multi-topical Captain Kidd.